Music in Kūṭiyāṭṭam

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Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the staging of Sanskrit drama in Kerala, in a peculiar, unique and very ancient and traditional way. Though it is a neglected art, it has not died out entirely. Three or four Chakyar families have kept it alive and portions of dramas are staged even to this day with little change from the method of presentation from the times of King Kulasekhara Varma.

It may be made clear at the outset that in Kūṭiyāṭṭam no songs are sung nor are *alapa* of *slokas* rendered in the Karnatak or other styles.

The musical aspects of Kūṭiyāṭṭam can be mainly divided into two sections.

1. Music connected with the *vachikabhinaya* (i.e.) the recitation or chanting of stanzas or even prose passages.
2. The back-ground music provided by the *mizhav, eddakka, kuzhithalam,* the *kuzhal* and the *sankhu.*

Stylised speech

Before the starting of the play the Nangiar, who keeps time with the *kuzhithalam* recites some *vandana* slokas, such as "*Sakala Surasura Gana Namitam*". This is now done in a sing-song manner suiting the metre of the slokas. Then the Nambiar recites the benedictory verse. There is little music in these two items as performed today.

During the course of the play the Chakyars have a peculiar way of chanting the verses. This is not ordinary recitation of the *slokas* in the typical Kerala styles nor is it singing of the *slokas* in any Karnatak or Hindustani *ragas*. It would be more or less appropriate to classify it with the chanting of the Vedas. The Chakyars call it "*Swarathil Cholluka.*"

The notes used for the chanting of *Rig* or *Yajur* vedas are well known—*anudata, udatta, swaritha* and *prachaya*. This calls for the use of three or four notes. The chanting of some vedas—*Sama Gana* as it is called—calls for the use of five or six notes, in the elongation of the notes lies its musicality.

The recitation of the *slokas* by Chakyars may be assigned a place mid-way between the chanting of Rig or Yajurveda and that of the *Sama Gana*. There is a definite mode of recitation. There are some twenty such modes or "quasi"- ragas, if I may so term them. They can be divided into three sections.

1. Modes used by certain characters
2. Modes used for expressing certain sentiments (*rasas*)
3. Modes used for certain situations or some description of nature.

There are some verses giving the names of these modes and their uses.

The authors of these verses are not known.

A verse in Malayalam giving the names of *ragas* is given below:

मुड्डन् श्रीकण्ठि तोण्डर्तिनिन्दळं मुरळीन्दळम्
वेळाधूळी तथा दाणं तर्कनुं वीरतर्कनुम्
कोरक्कुरुञ्जी पौराळी पुरनीरुं तथैव च
दु:खगान्धारावुं पिन्ने चेटीपञ्चम दाणवुम्
श्रीकामरं कैशिकियुं घट्टन्तरियुमन्तरि

The following verses in Sanskrit give the rules for the usage of these *ragas*. Some verses seem to be incomplete:

(1) वीरणां नायकादीनामुत्तमानां स्वभावत:
गीतसिद्धान्ततत्वज्ञैरिन्दळो राग इष्यते
(2) मध्यमानां तु पात्राणां क्वचिदिन्दळं एव हि
चेटीपञ्चमरागश्च क्वचिदित्युच्यते बुधै:
(3) नीचानामपि पात्राणां बालकानां तथैव च
चेटीपञ्चम एव स्यात् नेतरो दृश्यते क्वचित्
(4) अवस्थायान्तु गीतज्ञैरन्तरी राग इष्यते
वेळाधूळी सुरायान्तु भयानकरसेपि च
(5) प्रहर्षतिशये रागो भिन्नपञ्चम उच्यते
अतर्कित प्रमोदे तु राग: श्रीकामरो मत:
(6) शृंगाराख्यरसे प्रायो रागस्त्वार्तो निगद्यते
तन्मूर्छने तु पौराळी विप्रलंभस्य मूर्छने
(7) राक्षसानांन्तु शृंगारे रागो मुड्डो निगद्यते
तेषान्तु विप्रलंभस्य मूर्छने मुरळीन्दळ:
(8) श्रीरामस्य तु संभोग शृंगारे मुरळीन्दल:
रसयो: कैशिकां प्राहुर्हास्यबीभत्सयोरपि
(9) क्रोधे रौद्ररसे चापि तर्कराग उदाहृत:
वीरनाम्नि रसे रागो वीरतर्क: स्मृतो बुधै:
(10) दु:खगान्धाररागस्तु शोके च करुणे मत:
दाणरागोद्त्भुतरसे भयानकरसे क्वचित्
(11) दुष्टनिग्रहवार्तायां घट्टन्तरिरुदाहृत:
तोण्टाख्यराग: शान्तेपि भक्ति भावे च कथ्यते
(12) कोरक्कुरुञ्जिराग: स्यात् कपीनान्तु स्वभावत:
पोरनीराख्यरागस्तु वर्षकालस्य वर्णने
(13) प्रभावर्णनायाञ्च गीतज्ञैरुपगीयते
अङ्कावसाने श्रीकण्ठी दुष्टानामपि हिसंने
(14) सन्ध्यावर्णनवेलायां मध्याह्नस्य च वर्णने
भक्ति भावे च विदृत्भि: कथ्यते: कथ्यते गीतपारगै:

We shall take the *ragas* one by one:

I.	*Indala*	:	Normally used by *dheerodatta* heroes some-times by *madhyama patras*—lesser or secondary heroes-like Lakshmana. This mode is also used by Arjuna in the presence of Draupadi
2.	*Cheti Panchama*	:	for *madhyama* characters, for *kanchukis* and *chetis* and for *neecha patras*. Children use this alone
3.	*Antari*	:	for *kavi vakya*—for telling of stories, narrating
4.	*Veladhuli*	:	in perplexed condition. Indicates fear. Or when a message is shouted to someone standing far away.
5.	*Bhinna Panchama*	:	in extreme joy (like *sambhoga-sringara)*
6.	*Srikamara*	:	in unexpected joy
7.	*Artan*	:	in *sringara*
8.	*Pourali*	:	in *sringara moorchna* (it is also used in *vipralambha moorchana)*
9.	*Muddan*	:	*sringara* (especially *sambhoga, sringara* of *Rakshasas* or demons).
10.	*Muralindala*	:	Sri Rama's normal *sambhoga sringara*
11.	*kaisiki*	:	*hasya* and *bibhatsa*
12.	*Tarkan*	:	in anger—roudra
13.	*Veera Tarkan*	:	for *veera rasa*
14.	*Dukka Gangharam*	:	for *dukha* and *shoka* sorrowful mood
15.	*Danam*	:	for *atbhuta* and for *bhaya* in fear
16.	*Ghattanthari*	:	in news of the death of a *Dushta*, evil character
17.	*Thondu*	:	in *bhakthi* and *saantha rasa* devotional or peaceful mood
18.	*Korakurunji*	:	normal for monkeys
19.	*Poranir*	:	description of the Rainy Season
20.	*Srikandhi*	:	used at the end of an act. It is used also in the killing of bad characters, for *bhakthi*, for the description of sunset and noon.

Another set of verses prescribing the *ragas* is quoted below: these verses are not familiar to the Chakyars I have contacted:

वेलाधूलि वराटि तोडि पुरनीरान्धालिपौरालय-
स्तानश्चान्तरयश्च कामरमथ श्रीकण्ठटक्काह् वयौ
गान्धारश्च कुरुल्कुरुञ्अ विमला मुड्डाभिधाः कैशिका
हिन्दोलद्वय पञ्चमत्नमयसी रागाश्च नाट्ये स्मृताः
उषसि.......व्यत्यासे पुरनीर् वर्षवर्णने

श्रीकामरस्तु शृंगारे विस्मये तानमिष्यते
उत्कृष्टायां निकृष्टस्य कामे मुड्डाभिधानक:
हिन्दोलश्चोत्तमे पात्रे मध्यमे पञ्चमं भवेत्
प्रमेयस्यान्तरीं विद्यात् चेटीनां पञ्चमं भवेत्
कुरुल्क्कुरुञ्अर् वानराणां वेलाधूलिर् मुदान्विते श्रीकण्ठिरतिभक्त्यां तु भक्त्यां तोडी तु कथ्यते
वीरे रसे तर्कराग: उन्मादे मुरलीनदल:
हासयेतु कैशिकी पात्रे नीचे पात्रे वराटिका
दु:खे सुखे तु गान्धारमार्त: शृंगारमिश्रितम्

Ragas Thodi, Varadi, Panchamam, Veera Panchaman, Andhali, Vimala, (is it a *raga* or an adjective qualifying another *raga*?) are found in these but *Thondu* and *Aartan* are not found. *Artan* is very commonly used by *Chakyars*. Whether these two are identical with some of the *ragas* in the above *verses* is not known. Some names are slightly altered. *Tanam* for *Danam, Thakka* for *Tharkan, Hindola for Indala* etc. In the new *ragas* here, *Panchama* and *Veera Panchama* are prescribed for the recitation of some *Nirvahana slokas*.

To the uninitiated there would appear to be little difference between the different *swaras* used—especially so when only one character is on the stage. When however, two actors are on the stage—a master and servant—one can easily note that the way of chanting is different.

Going through the names of these *ragas*, one is struck by the similarity of the names with those of the *ragas* found in Indian music. Some of the names are even identical.

Bhinna Panchama is a *Janya* of *Ganamoorthy* in karnatak music. *Srikandhi* is a *Janya* of *Shadvindha-margini* in Karnatak music. It is used in Kathakali music also.

While *Chedi Panchama* is not traceable among Karnatak *ragas* there are a number of "*Panchama*" *ragas*. It is significant that *Chedi Panchama* is prescribed for use of *Chedis* in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. While *Pourali* is not found in Karnatak music there is a *Bhinna Pourali*, (a *Janya of Dhavalambari*).

A much more significant point to be noted is the similarity of the names of these *ragas* with the names of Tamil *Panns*. In ancient Tamil music, *ragas* were called *Panns* and *Thirams*. They are also classified as suitable for day time or night time etc. The names of these *panns* can be seen in the compositions of *Thevaram* songs.

The following *raga*-names are identical in Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Tamil *panns: Indalam. Indalam* is also used in Kathakali music. Some names are found with only a slight alteration—which is only consistent with the normal change in other words from Tamil to Malayalam.

Poranir	..	*Poranirmani*

Incidentally, *Poranir* is also found in Kathakali songs.

Kaisiki	..	*Kousikam*
Srikamaram	..	*Sikamaram*
Tarkan	..	*Takkaragam*

Though *Korakurunji* is not found elsewhere, *kuranji* is a common Karnatak and Tamil *raga*. There is a Tamil *raga* called *Antheem Kuranji* sung by the Koravanom community.

Dukhagandharam — This is found in Kathakali music. In Tamil *panns*, there is a *Kantharam* and *Piyandai Kandaram.*

All these would go to show the close connection between Kootiyattam and Tamil culture. As already pointed out the *slokas* are only chanted and not sung and so the similarity is confined only to the names of the *ragas* at present. Whether, in the distant past the *slokas* used to be sung in the *ragas* and later whether they were reduced to mere chants, or whether the names of the chant were adopted for *ragas* developed after the development of Kootiyattam, are matters for speculation.

The modes of chanting have come down from *guru* to *sishya* for the last ten centuries or so. Due to the passage of time and the neglect of the art some of them are as good as lost. The time is, therefore, overdue to make proper recording of the various modes which are in vogue now. Later they could be analysed and a simple notation could be evolved for these chants to help the artists to remember the modes easily.

We shall now consider the instruments:

Kuzhithalam or Cymbals:

These are used by the Nangiar, for keeping the *tala*. The Nangiar is also an actress and is expected to know all aspects of the chanting and dancing and *abhinaya* of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

Sankhu or Conch

This is considered an auspicious instrument, and a sign of royalty. It is sounded in the background when important personalities appear on the stage (as Kathakali, too).

Edkka

This is an hour-glass-shaped percussion instrument. The tension strings are manipulated by one hand and the drumming is done with a stick held in the other hand. Notes to cover nearly two octaves can be produced by the manipulation of the tension strings and there are experts, who can even play songs on the instrument. It is played in the *sopanas* of temples, and for *lasya* dances in Kathakali, and in *Pancha vadya.* While the instrument is a good accompaniment for Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the volume produced is so low that it gets drowned in the din of the other instruments.

Kuzhal or kurum Kuzhal

This instrument is practically the same as the *Shehnai* of the north or the *Mukha Veena* of the South. This instrument is seen in the *Chenda Mela* of Kerala, where it is used as a *tala* instrument. It is usually the leading piper, who controls of the *Chenda Melam*. One can hear melody played on this instrument during the *Kuzhalpattu* played during the temple festivals.

The correct function of the *Kuzhal* in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam orchestra is not clear. If it be for keeping the *tala*, as in the case of the *Chenda Melam*, it is not being used so now. If it be for producing a melodious refrain in the background, the question will arise—which *ragas*

are to be played and when? As prevalent today the *Kuzhal* player—if he be one who is not good at Karnatak music—often plays a series of notes which produce an unmusical or jarring effect. If the player is good at Karnatak music he goes on playing a series of *ragas* at his command. These mainly, have no relation to the sentiments or action portrayed by the across. Hence as it stands today, the function of *Kuzhal* is not clear. I for one, can never imaging that the originators of this wonderful art of Kūṭiyāṭṭam—who were so particular in the use of different *ragas* for different shades of the same *rasa*—would ever have allowed the indisciplined freedom that the *Kuzhal* player now appropriates to himself.

There is scope, rather an urgent need, for an immediate reform in the mode of playing the *Kuzhal*. Either, it can confine itself to playing the *jatis* of the *tala* that is used, or it should confine itself to playing a melody appropriate to the sentiments portrayed, or to the character who in a particular scene dominates the stage.

Considering the position of the chanting of the verses and the present-day indiscipline of the *Kuzhal* I am inclined to believe that the verses may have been sung in appropriate *ragas* once. At one stage a reformer must have come forward and altered the system and changed the singing to a Vedic type of chant. That reformer—one, presumably with no ear for music—must have allowed the *Kuzhala-wala* to fend for himself.

It may be noted in this connection that about 1,000 A.D. a poet, Tholan, (it is believed) brought some reforms in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Allowing the *Vidushaka* to speak in Malayalam, and his recitation of *prati slokas* in Malayalam parodying the verses (in Sanskrit) of the hero, his expositions or *purusharthas* (*Veshya Gamana, Veshya Vanchana, Ashana* and *Rajaseva*). etc. are attributed to the changes brought about by Tholan. The verses attributed to Tholan do not encourage one to believe that he was much inclined musically.

It may be mentioned here that in North Indian music the importance given in practice to *sruti* is stressed more than is the case with Karnatak music. In Karnatak music the importance given to *tala* is a bit more than in the North. In Kerala, melodic music, especially in the temple arts has practically disappeared, but the *tala vadyas* are given prime importance. It is, therefore, not surprising that the wonderful *Shehnai* of the North becomes an obscure *Mukha Veena* in the South and a mere *tala* instrument in Kerala.

Mizhav

The *Mizhav* is a big pot with a piece of leather stretched right and tired across its mouth. Formerly, it used to be made of clay. The present-day instruments are of copper. The ones at Trichur Temple are about 36" high and about 26" in diameter at the widest point. The neck protrudes some 5" from the body and the diameter of the neck is about 6". The *mizhavu* is held in a vertical position in a stand. A seat is arranged for the *Nambiar* on top of the stand. The *Mizhavu* is not played when verses or prose passages are recited by the actors, who give a signal for the *Nambiar* to stop playing before they start the *vachikabhinaya*.

In its primitive form *mizhavu* is only one step higher than the *Ghatam* used in Karnatak music. It is played by beating on the leather surface with both the palms and the fingers. The *mizhavu* is the most important *tala* accompaniment in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. In a few temples in Madras State an identical or almost similar instrument is seen and is called *Kota-Muzha*.

The *Jatis* for the various talas are played on the *mizhavu* for the dancing and the *abhinaya* of the actor. As the instrument has only a piece of leather stretched over the mouth of a pot and since it is played with the palms it may be considered that much tonal variation is not possible, but the possibilities of the tonal variation may be understood by the following *vayathari* (or *solkettu* or *bols*).

Tharha Tharhim: Thaththa: Tha Thatha Tha Tha
Tharhi Tharham: Tharhakim Tha Tha,
Dhakkukum Dhakkukum Dhoram Dheram etc.

Two instruments are used-one keeps time and the other plays the vinyasa.

The mythology of the *mizhavu* is interesting. Kūṭiyāṭṭam itself is supposed to be a creation of *Brahma*, who took words from the *Rig veda, abhinaya* (dramatic expression) from the *Yajur*, the *swarar* (notes of music) from *Sama veda* and the *rasas* (moods) from the *Atharva veda*. The disciples of Bharata (author of *Natya sastra*) were perplexed as to what should be the instrument for Kūṭiyāṭṭam. They had a dream in which the *mizhavu* appeared.

The *mizhavu* has to be subjected to religious ceremonies like *jathakarma, namakarana*, etc., up to *upanayana*. Only members of the *Nambyar* community can play on it and that, too, only at the time of performance. For practicing the *talas* some make-shift instruments are provided for the students. The *mizhavu* is placed in the *kuthapa sthana* of the *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* (Theatre). The *mizhavu* is said to be a confirmed Bachelor (*Nitya Brahma Chari*), who studies *Rigveda* constantly and meditates on the *Nadabrahama* with *pranava* (*OM*). The *mizhav* is is used only in Kūṭiyāṭṭam and not for any other temple ritual or art.

We shall now consider the *talas* of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

गीतं वाद्यं तथा नृत्तम्
येन कालेन मीयते
स कालस्ताळ इत्युक्तो
मुनिभिर्भरतादिभि:

तकारस्ताण्डव: प्रोक्तो
लकारो लास्यइन्यत:
शिवशक्त्यात्मकस्ताल:
प्रतिष्ठा गेयवस्तुन:

तालहीनानि गेयानि
मन्त्रहीना यथाहुति:
तालस्तल प्रतिष्ठाया
मिति धातोर्घञ्जि स्मृत:

गीतं वाद्यं तथा नृत्तम्
त्रयं ताले प्रतिष्ठितम्

तालमूलानि गेयानि
सर्वं ताले प्रतिष्ठितम्

तालं दृष्टवा प्रणम्यादौ
पश्चाद्वादनमारभेत्
ततो नादं प्रकुर्वीत
पश्चात् गीतमुदीरयेत्

From these stanzas the importance given to *tala* may be guaged.

Since the Nambiar is seated behind the actor, he has to be well-versed in the art of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, if he is to play the appropriate *jatis* for the various *talas* to give proper effect to the *abhinaya* of the Chakyar. The following *talas* are usually used.

1. *Ekatala:* Usually, 4 *matras:* similar to *Ekatala* of Karnatak music.
2. *Dhruvatala:* 14 *matras:* similar to *Dhruvatala* of Karnatak music.
3. *Triputatala:* 7 *matras:* similar to *Tisrajati Triputa* of Karnatak music.
4. *Thampatala:* 10 *matras:* similar to *Jhampatala* of Karnatak music.
5. *Chempatatala:* 8 *matras:* similar to *Jhompata* or *Adi tala* of Karnatak music.
6. *Atanthatala:* 14 *matras: Ata tala* of Karnatak music.

As in the case of the ragas there are some verses prescribing a *tala* to be played for particular occasions. Some verses seem to be incomplete. Information other than that given in the verses are also given below:

Ekatala

श्रीकण्ठि तोण्डु पोरनीर्
कैशिकास्विन्दइळेषु च
एकतालो विनिर्दिष्टो
भिन्नपञ्चम दु:खयो:

When the *ragas Srikanthi, Thondu, Poraniru, Kaisiki, Indalam, Bhinnapanchaman* and *Dukkha Gandharan* are used *Ekatala* is to be played. It is also used for *hasya bibhatsa*, for the *adbhuta rasa* of *dhirodatta characters*. *Ekatala* of a different type is used when the *Vidushakaka* acts. It is also used for such dance bits known as *kundalamittu mutichu kottotu kooti cholluka.*

Dhruvatala

मुड्डार्ततर्करागेषु
कोरक्कुरुञ्जिरागे च
ध्रुवताल: प्रकीर्तित:

When *ragas Muddan Tarkan* and *Korakkurunji* are used *Dhruvatala* is to be used. It is used in *adbhuta, bhayanaka, Rakshasa—sambhoga sringara, vipralambha, sringara* of

dhirodhatta characters. In *Nitya Kriya Valiyakkitha, Valiya Kesadipada, Vattamthattal* etc.

Thriputatala

मध्यम मात्रां त्रिपुटाम्
वेळाधूळयां वदन्ति तालज्ञाः

Medium tempo *Thriputa* is used when *Veladhyli* is recited. It is also used in *Bhayanaka, yasiyasi pullarikka, matam etukkuka, parikraman, arangu perumattam: perumpara kottuka.*

घट्टन्तर्यारव्यरागे. . .
त्रिपुटताल एव स्यात्
स विलंबितमात्रक:

In *Gattantari raga Triputa* in slow tempo is to be used. It is also used in *krodha, roundra*—especially of *dhirodhatta* characters, in *Jatthi, kailasamitikkuka sikharam pottichu eriyuka.*

श्रीकामरे च पौराळयां
त्रिपुटातिद्रुता मता

When using *Srikamara* and *Pourali, Triputa* in fast tempo has to be used.

अपरे पुनर्हि नाटये
ध्रुव इति कैश्चित् द्रुतोप्युक्त:

In other dance bits *Dhruvatala* in fast or slow tempo has to be used.

मुरलीन्दळरागेतु ध्रुवतालो विलंबित:

In Sri Ramas *Sambhoga Sringara* slow tempo *Dhruvatala* is to be used.

Jhampatala is used when *Yaugandharayana* does *Kangapatrathil natakkuka.* Also when *Thattu* is played.

When a character acts that he hears what others are saying *Atan* is used.

When *goshthi* is played (before the start of the play to assemble the audience) *Chempatatala* is used.

In a dance of *Jatayu, Lakshmi tala* (same as *Lakshisa tala* of Karnatak music) is played. Different talas according to circumstances have to be used for *Nitya kriya, Ther Perumattam, Pakshi sthobham, Kalapurathu natakkuka, Udghattanam* etc.

The old *acharyas* have however, given one relief to the perplexed player. When in doubt he can use the *Ekatala* (like *Sarva Laghu* of the *Mridanga* player).

एकता लेन कार्य स्यात्
अन्यत्सर्वं यथोचितं

This glorious art is facing total extinction. There are hardly four actors who can

independently act and direct the plays. Junior actors may make up to another four. Though the Kerala Kalamandalam has started a course in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, there are only two students there for acting and none at all for playing the *mizhavu*. Due to the lack of training, which of course is due to lack of patronage a good actress (Nangiar) is hardly to be seen. Many Nangiars go off the *tala* while keeping time, making the work of the Chakyar all the more difficult. There are barely a couple of good Nambiars for playing the *mizhavu*. Some of the *Nambiars* make such a din while playing that one can hardly sit inside the theatre.

For the proper preservation of available records and to give new life to the art, it is essential to take immediate steps to remedy conditions. It should not be left merely in the hands of traditional families or in those of amateurs.

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